

The story of Mackinac /

THE STORY OF MACKINAC.¹ BY THE EDITOR.

¹ Originally prepared as an address before the American Library Association, at its meeting on Mackinac Island, September 8, 1896, and in that form published in *The Library Journal*, Dec., 1896. As given in the present volume, it has been somewhat modified, to suit the different conditions of publication. In the preparation of the paper, I have consulted, among others, the following authorities:

The Jesuit Relations.

Michigan Pioneer and Historical Collections.

Irving's *Astoria*.

Parkman's *Works*.

Winsor's *Narrative and Critical History of America* (Boston, 1889). Shea's *History of the Catholic Missions among the Indian Tribes of the U. S.* (N. Y., 1855).

Bailey's *Mackinac, formerly Michilimackinac* (Lansing, Mich., 1896).

Cook's *Mackinaw in History* (Lansing, 1895). Cook's *Drummond Island* (Lansing, 1896).

Hubbard's *Memorials of a Half Century* (N. Y., 1887).

Kelton's *Annals of Fort Mackinac* (issued annually).

Littlejohn's *Legends of Michigan and the Old North West* (Allegan, Mich., 1875).

Roberts's *City of the Straits* (Detroit, 1884).

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Strickland's *Old Mackinaw* (Phila., 1860).

Van Fleet's *Old and New Mackinac* (Phila., and Ann Arbor, Mich., 1869–70).

Whitcomb's *Lake Tour to Picturesque Mackinac* (Detroit, 1884).

Williams's *Early Mackinac* (St. Louis, 1897).

For two and a quarter centuries Mackinac has played no inconsiderable part on the stage of American history. Early recognized as a vantage-point, commanding the commerce of the two uppermost lakes of the great chain,—Michigan and Superior,—red men and white men have struggled for its mastery, tribe against tribe, nation I 2 against nation. The *fleur-de-lis*, the union jack, and the stars and stripes, have here each in their turn been symbols of conqueror and conquered; councils have been held here, and treaties signed, which settled the political ownership of fertile regions as wide as all Europe; and, when at last armed hostilities ceased through the final surrender to the Republic, when the tomahawk was buried and the war-post painted white, a new warfare opened at Mackinac—the commercial war of the great fur-trade companies, whose rival banners contested the sway of lands stretching from Athabasca to the Platte. from the Columbia to the Sault Ste. Marie. It is a far cry from the invasion of Ojibwa Michillimackinac by the long-haired *couriers de bois* of New France, to the invasion of Mackinac Island by modern armies of summer tourists from New England. In attempting, within this narrow compass, to tell the story of how it all came about, it will be impracticable to take more than a bird's-eye view.

In the first place, let us understand that the term Mackinac, as used in our earliest history, is the title of the entire district hereabout, as well as that of a definite settlement. There have been, in chronological succession, at least three distinct localities specifically styled Mackinac: (1) Between 1670 and 1706 the Mackinac of history was on the north side of the strait, upon Point St. Ignace, and wholly under the French régime. (2) From 1712 to 1781 Mackinac was on the south side of the strait—until 1763, just west of the present

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Mackinaw City, and possibly between 1764 and 1781 at some point farther west along the coast of Lake Michigan; this south side Mackinac was at first French and then English, and the site near Mackinaw City has come to be known in history as “Old Mackinaw.” Finally (3), the Mackinac Settlement was in 1781 located upon the island near the centre of the strait, and while at first under English domination at last became American. A remembrance of these facts will help to dispel the fog which has often obscured our historical view of Mackinac—a fog which designing guide-book writers delight to 3 maintain, for they wish to beguile the summer tourist into believing that Mackinac Island has a clear title to fame, stretching back unto good Father Marquette.

That indefatigable explorer of high seas and pathless forests, Samuel de Champlain, planted the first permanent French colony in Canada, on the rock of Quebec, in 1608—only a twelve month later than the establishment of Jamestown in far-off Virginia, and full twelve years before the coming to Plymouth of the Pilgrim Fathers. It was seven years before Champlain saw Lake Huron, his farthest point west in the limitless domain which the king of France had set him to govern. Twenty-one years had passed,—years of heroic struggling to push back the walls of savagery which ever hemmed him in,—when one day there came to Quebec, in the fleet of Indian canoes from this far Northwest,—which annually picked its way over 1500 miles of rugged waterways beset with a multitude of terrors,—a naked Algonkin, besmeared with grease and colored clays, who laid at the feet of the great white chief a lump of copper mined on the shores of Lake Superior. A shadowy region this, as far removed from the ordinary haunts of the adventurous woodsmen of New France as were the headwaters of the Nile from the African explorers of a generation ago, and quite as dangerous of access.

It was five years later (1634) before Champlain could see his way to sending a proper emissary into the Northwest. Finally one was found in the person of young Jean Nicolet, whom Champlain had trained in the forest for tasks like this. Conveyed by Indian oarsmen engaged by relays in the several tribes through which he passed, Nicolet pushed up the St. Lawrence, portaged around the rapids at Lachine ascended the trough of the turbulent

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Ottawa with its hundred waterfalls, portaged over to Lake Nipissing, descended French Creek to Georgian Bay, and threading the gloomy archipelago of the Manitoulins, sat at last in a Chippewa council at Sault Ste. Marie. Doubtless he here heard of Lake Superior, not many miles away, but it does not appear that he saw its waters; intent on finding a path which led to the China Sea, supposed not to be far beyond this point, he turned south again, and pushing on through these straits of Mackinac found and traversed Lake Michigan. He traded and made treaties with the astonished tribesmen of Wisconsin and Illinois, who in him saw their first white man, and brought the Northwest within the sphere of French influence.¹

¹ Authorities on Nicolet are: Butterfield's *History of the Discovery of the Northwest by John Nicolet* (Cinn., 1881); Gosselin's *Lea Normands au Canada—Jean Nicolet* (Evreux, 1893); Jouan's "Interprets voyageur au Canada, 1618–1642," in *La Revue Canadienne*, Février, 1886; Sulte's *Mélanges d'histoire et de littérature* (Ottawa, 1876); articles by Garneau, Ferland, Suite, etc., in *Wis. Hist. Colls.*; and a bibliography by Butterfield in *ibid.*, xi, pp. 23, 25.

Seven years later the Jesuit missionaries, Jogues and Raymbault, following in the path of the exploring trader Nicolet, said mass before two thousand breech-clouted savages at Sault Ste. Marie. Affairs moved slowly upon these far-away borders of New France in the seventeenth century. Jogues and Raymbault had long been ashes before the Northwest again appeared on the pages of history; nearly a generation had passed (1658–62) before the daring forest traders and explorers, Radisson and Groseillers, came upon the scene, discovered the Upper Mississippi, discovered Lake Superior, and first made known to the English the fur-trading capabilities of the Hudson Bay region. The Hudson's Bay Company was organized in London, with these renegade Frenchmen as their pilots, in 1670; the following year, at Sault Ste. Marie, Saint Lusson formally took possession of the great Northwest for the French king.² I suppose that Saint Lusson, when he floated the banner of France at the gateway of Lake Superior, knew nothing of his English neighbors, the

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Hudson's Bay Company; unconsciously he made an important play for France on the American chess-board; but a century later England won the game.

2 See Saint Lusson's procès-verbal (June 14, 1671), in *Wis. Hist. Colls.*, xi, pp. 26–29.

Those who have read Parkman's *Jesuits* will remember 5 that the Hurons, whose habitat had long been upon the eastern shores of Georgian Bay, retreated northward and westward before the advance of the all-conquering Iroquois. At first taking refuge with starving Algonkins on the Manitoulin Islands, and on the mainland hereabout, they were soon driven forth by their merciless foe, and made their stand in the swamps and tangled woods of far-away Wisconsin. Many of them centred upon Chequamegon Bay, the island-locked estuary near the southwest corner of Lake Superior, the ancient home of the Ojibwas. Here Radisson and Groseilliers visited and traded with them.¹ The Jesuit Ménard, who had accompanied these adventurers,—the first missionary to follow in the wake of Jogues and Raymbault,—had stopped at Keweenaw Bay to minister to the Ottawas, and later lost his life while trying to reach a village of Hurons, crouching, fear-stricken, in the forest fastnesses around the headwaters of the Black River.² Then came, three years later (1665), Father Alloüez, to reopen at Chequamegon Bay the Jesuit mission on our greatest inland sea. Alloüez being ordered, after four years of arduous and I fear unprofitable labor at Chequamegon, to found a mission at Green Bay, was succeeded (1669) by the youthful Marquette. But Marquette was not long at Chequamegon before his half-naked parishioners provoked to quarrel their powerful western neighbors, the Sioux, the result being (1670) that the Chequamegon bands, and Marquette with them, were driven like leaves before an autumn blast eastward along the southern shore of the great lake; the Ottawas taking up their homes in the Manitoulin Islands, the Hurons and the Ojibwas accompanying Marquette to a little fur-trading station on the north shore of

¹ Radisson's "Journal" first appeared in *Prince Soc. Pubs.*, xvi, (Boston, 1885). Portions were republished with notes, in *Wis. Hist. Colls.*, xi. See the following monographs on this

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subject: Campbell's "Exploration of L. Superior," *Parkman Club Pubs.* No. 2 (Milw., 1896), and Moore's "Discoveries of L. Superior," in *Mich. Polit. Sci. Ass. Pubs.*, ii, No. 5 (Ann Arbor, 1897).

2 See Campbell's "Père René Ménard," *Parkman Club Pubs.* No. 11 (Milw., 1897).

6 the Straits of Mackinac, where he established the mission of St. Ignace.

Here, in "a rude and unshapely chapel, its sides of logs and its roof of bark," Marquette ministered to the miserable savages about him, and to the handful of nomadic furtrade employees who in spring and autumn gathered at this isolated frontier post of New France on their way to and from the great wilderness beyond. Louis Joliet, the *coureur de bois*, was sent forth by the authorities at Quebec (1673) to explore the Mississippi River, about which so much had been heard. and by that route to reach, it may be, the great Western Ocean—for the road to India, either through the continent or by way of the Northwest Passage, was still being sought in those days. He stopped at Point St. Ignace and brought orders to Marquette to accompany him. The conversion of the Indians went hand in hand. in New France, with the extension of commerce; no trading-post was complete without its missionary, no exploring expedition without its ghostly counsellor. And so Marquette, a true soldier of the cross, receiving marching orders, promptly closed his little mission hut and went forth to help discover unknown lands and carry to their peoples the word of Christ. With Joliet he entered the Upper Mississippi at Prairie du Chien, and proceeded far enough down the great river to establish the fact that it emptied into the Gulf of Mexico and not the Pacific Ocean. It is probable that Radisson and Groseilliers were there thirteen years before them; but Radisson's Journal, written in England long after, was not published until our own time, and it is not at all likely that Joliet and Marquette, or any one else of importance in New France, ever heard of this prior claim. The merit of carefully-planned, premeditated discovery certainly rests with Joliet and his companion. It so happened—you of course remember the story of the swamping of Joliet's home-returning canoe in the wild rapids of Lachine—that the detailed journals and maps of

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the chief were lost: whereas the simple story which Marquette wrote at the Green Bay mission, and 7 transmitted by Indian courier to his father superior at Quebec, reached its destination and was published to the world for the glory of the church. Thus it was that the gentle, unassuming Marquette, who was the supernumerary of the expedition, became unwittingly its only historian; fate willed that his name should be more commonly associated with the great discovery than that of his secular superior. Four years later the weary bones of this missionary-explorer who had died on his way thither from the savage camps of the Illinois, were laid to rest “in a little vault in the middle of the chapel” at St. Ignace. In September, 1877, when antiquarians could but ingeniously guess at the site of this early mission in the wilderness, the bones of Father Marquette were discovered in the rude grave wherein they had rested for two centuries, and to-day are visible relics for inspiration to deeds of holiness.¹

¹ A detailed account, in German, of the discovery (said to have been written by Father Edward Jacket, then the Catholic missionary at St. Ignace) appeared first in the St. Louis *Pastoral-Blatt*; an English translation was published in the Green Bay (Wis.) *Advocate*, Aug. 29, 1878. The site of the old mission was discovered May 4, but the remains of Marquette were not exhumed until Sept. 3. See controversial articles in the St. Louis *Sunday Messenger*, June 24, 1877, and in the Chicago *Times*, Aug. 14 and 29, and Sept. 13, 1879.

Throughout the seventeenth century the outpost of Mackinac at Point St. Ignace—Michillimackinac, in those easy-going days when there was more time in which to pronounce the name—remained the most important French military and trading station in the upper lakes, for it guarded the gateway between Huron, Michigan, and Superior; and every notable expedition to the Northwest waters had perforce to stop here. We must not think of this Mackinac of the seventeenth century, strategically important though it was, as a settlement in any modern sense. The policy of the rulers of New France was to maintain the interior of the continent as a fur-bearing wilderness. Unlike Anglo-Saxons, they had no desire to plant settlements simply as settlements. They had not the colonizing

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spirit of Englishmen. To carry the fur trade to the uttermost limits, to bring the savages to at least a nominal recognition of the cross, were their chief aims; to this end, palisaded trading-posts, which they rather grandiloquently called forts, were established throughout the country, the officers of which were rare diplomatists, and bullied and cajoled the red men as occasion demanded. Around each of these little forts, and Mackinac was one of them, were small groups of *habitants*, *voyageurs*, and *coureurs de bois*, who could hardly be called colonists, for few of them expected to lay their bones in the wilderness, but eventually to return to their own people on the Lower St. Lawrence, when enriched or their working days were over. It was rather an army of occupation than a body of settlers.

The little log fort at Mackinac, calculated only to withstand a fusillade of savage arrows and musket-balls, was the principal feature of the place, and the commandant the chief personage. After him, the long-robed Jesuit, and then the swarm of folk dependent on the spasmodic fur trade. A lot of shiftless, easy-going, jolly dogs were the latter—the work-a-day French Canadians of the wilderness posts. First in this category, the *bourgeois*, or masters of the forest trade; then the *voyageurs*, or boatmen, who were as well men-of-all-work, propelling the canoes when afloat, carrying the boats over portages, transporting packs of goods and furs through the forest inlands, caring for the camps, and acting as guards for the persons and property of their employers; the *coureurs de bois*, or wood rangers, were men devoted to a life in the woods, for the fun and excitement in it, sometimes conducting a far-reaching fur trade on their own account the widest travelers and most daring spirits in all the great Northwest; the *habitants*, or permanent villagers, were most of them farmers in a small way. Down by the beach were their little log-cabins, with their well-sweeps and orchards, back of which stretched the narrow, ribbon-like fields, such as one may see to-day at Quebec and Montreal. The French *habitant* was a social animal. He loved the village wine-shop, where, undisturbed by his sharp-eyed sharp-visaged, prim and gossipy, white-aproned spouse, he could enjoy his pipe, his bowl, and his “fiddlers three.” For they were famous fiddlers, these French Canadians. The fiddle was indispensable on social occasions. No wilderness so far away that the lit fie French

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fiddle had not been there. The Indian recognized it as a part of the furniture of every fur-trader's camp. At night, as the wanderers lounged around the blazing heap of logs, the sepulchral arches of the forest resounded with the piercing strains of tortured catgut, accompanying the gayly-turbaned *voyageurs*, as in metallic tones they chanted favorite melodies of the river, the chase, love, and the wassail. In the village, no christening or wedding was complete without the fiddler; and at the almost nightly social gatherings, in each other's puncheon-floored cabins, the fiddler, enthroned cross-legged on a plank table, was the king of the feast. The waterway was their highway. From earliest youth they understood the handling of a canoe. Just as, in the Southwest, the cowboy mounts his horse to cross the street, and refuses work that cannot be done on the back of a broncho, the French Canadian went in a boat to visit his next-door neighbor.¹

¹ The writer has taken the liberty, in the foregoing paragraph, of borrowing some of the phraseology from his *Story of Wisconsin* (Boston, 1890).

Thus matters progressed, in their even way, until the year of grace 1701, when the little group upon Point St. Ignace received word one day that a new post, called Detroit, had been established away down in the unknown country at the narrow mouth of Lake Huron. which was henceforth, under one Cadillac, to be the centre of commerce in these western parts. Heretofore, owing to the Iroquois stoutly holding the lower lakes against the French, progress to the far Northwest had been altogether by way of the raging Ottawa. But now, after seventy-five long years of journeying by that toilsome route, it had from various reasons become possible to come up here through Lakes Ontario and Erie. This new post, Detroit, was to command a still wider range than that of Mackinac; the garrison was soon withdrawn thither; the fur traders, both 10 white and Indian, for the most part, soon followed—it was easy for a population like this to pull up stakes and hie away at beat of drum. Nearly everybody went to the new Mecca, save the Jesuit missionaries, who were not wanted by this new man Cadillac, a hater of the “black robes.” For five years the good fathers—there were three of them then—maintained their little chapel and school here on

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Point St. Ignace; but they ministered to an ever-decreasing, disorderly flock, and at last, burning their crude buildings, with a few white followers retired discomfited to Quebec.

For six years there does not appear to have been any French establishment hereabout. But in 1712 Governor General Vaudreuil sent De Louvigny, a noted frontier captain, to restore the abandoned post on the upper waters. This he did, but upon the south shore of the strait, not far west of the present Mackinaw City; and over there on the mainland, at what came in time to be known as “Old Mackinaw”¹ —although it was, as we have seen, not the oldest Mackinac—occurred such historic events as are spread upon the records to the credit of this name between 1712 and 1768. It was on the ramparts of Old Mackinaw that, in token of the fall of New France, the *fleur-de-lis* was at last hauled down on the 28th of September, 1761, and the union jack proudly lifted to the breeze. Here, upon the 4th of June, 1763, occurred that cruel massacre of the English garrison, which Parkman has so vividly described to us in his *Conspiracy of Pontiac* .

¹ Notice the change in spelling. The historic name is Mackinac, a cut-short of Michillimackinac, and such is to-day the legal designation of Fort Mackinac, Strait of Mackinac, and Mackinac Island; but the pronunciation is Mackinaw. The spelling has been made phonetic in the cases of Old Mackinaw and Mackinaw City, to distinguish them from the island, and many writers prefer to use the phonetic form whenever mentioning any of the several Mackinacs. A cultured native of Mackinac Island has told me that, so far as he knew, but one person pronounced it Macki *nack*; and he was Samuel Abbott, of the old American Fur Company, who was regarded in his day as an eccentric.

A year or more later the English rebuilt their fort, but ¹¹ whether or not upon the site of the massacre is a moot question. There appears to be good reason for the belief that it was among the sand-dunes farther west along the coast, for in the official correspondence of the next fifteen years there is much complaint upon the part of commandants that their “rickety picket is commanded by sand hills”—a condition which does not exist at the old site near Mackinaw City.

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To this rickety picket there came one October day, in the year 1779, Patrick Sinclair, lieutenant-governor of Michillimackinac and its dependencies, charged with the rebuilding and enlarging of His Majesty's post in these parts. The Revolutionary War was in progress. George Rogers Clark had captured Kaskaskia and Vincennes; his emissaries were treating with Indian chiefs away off in Wisconsin; there were rumors of Clark's intended foray on Detroit; and some suspicions that the "Bostonais," as the French Canadians called these leather-shirred Virginians had designs of putting a war vessel upon Lake Michigan. Sinclair saw at once that the old site was untenable and the fort beyond repair.

In advance of orders he made a bold step. Seven miles away to the northeast of Old Mackinaw lay a comely island in the midst of the strait—"La Grosse Isle," the Canadians called it, although smaller than its neighbor, Bois Blanc; a sort of shrine, the earliest Indians deemed it, where at times they gathered at their medicine feasts, and to which, as to a sanctuary, they fled in periods of extreme danger. It is thought that Marquette once taught the natives there, upon his first arrival, but if so, it was not for long. Frenchmen were more considerate of the superstitions of the dusky tribesmen than were the intolerant English. This untenanted island Sinclair appropriated to the king's use, although he formally bought it from the Indians some eighteen months later for £5000, New York currency. A month after his arrival the lieutenant-governor began to erect a durable fort on the island, and thither, at last receiving permission from his superiors, he finally removed in the spring of 1781, with him going the now revived Catholic mission and the entire fur-trade colony from the south shore. The new fort still bore the name of Fort Mackinac, and La Grosse Isle of the French was rechristened Mackinac Island.

By the treaty of Paris of 1783, Mackinac came within the boundary of the United States; but the English still held the whip-hand in these parts, and upon sundry pretexts continued to hold this and other lake posts until the Jay treaty set matters right. In October, 1796, American troops first took possession of the post, and this gateway to the upper lakes was as last ours. The English, however were still hopeful that they would some day win this

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part of our country back again, and their garrison retired to Isle St. Josephs, only some 40 miles to the northeast, where in 1795 they had built a fort.

The French and half-breeds did not at first relish Yankee interference in their beloved Northwest. They had gotten along very nicely with the English, who fostered the fur trade and employed the French with liberality. Then, too, among the Creoles the reputation of these Americans was not of the best. They were known to be a busy, bustling, driving people, quite out of tune with the devil-may-care methods of the French, and were, moreover, an agricultural race that was fast narrowing the limits of the hunting grounds. The Frenchmen felt that their interests in this respect were identical with those of the savages, hence we find in the correspondence of the time a very bitter tone adopted towards the new-comers, who were regarded as intruders and covetous disturbers of existing commercial and social relations.

When war broke out between us and England, in 1812, naturally the Creoles of the Northwest were against us, and freely entered the service of their old and well-trying friends the English. Fort Mackinac was then garrisoned by "57 effective men, including officers." There had been no news sent here of the declaration of war, although the American lieutenant in charge, Porter Hanks, was expecting it. July 17, 1812, a British force of 1000 whites and Indians from Fort St. Josephs secretly effected a landing at the cove on the northwest shore of the island—known today as "British Landing," took possession of the heights overlooking the fort, and then coolly informed the commandant that hostilities had been declared between the two nations, and a surrender would be in order. The Americans were clearly at the mercy of the enemy, and promptly capitulated.

The old fort had never from the first been in good conditions. The English, once more in possession, built a new and stronger fort upon the higher land to the rear, which they had occupied, and named it Fort George, in honor of their sovereign. This stronghold was stormed on the 4th of August, 1814, by United States troops under Col. George Croghan, who also disembarked at British Landing. The English position, however, was

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too strong for the assailants who lost heavily under the galling fire of the French and Indian allies, and Croghan was obliged to retire. Among his dead was Major Holmes, a soldier of considerable reputation.

The treaty of Ghent resulted in the fortification being restored to the United States, the transfer being actually made on the eighteenth of July, 1815. Col. McDouall, the British commander at Mackinac, was loath to leave. His despatches plainly indicate that he thought his government weak in surrendering to the Americans, for whom he had a decided contempt, this Malta of the Northwest. When at last obliged to go, he went no farther than necessary—indeed not quite as far, for he built a fort upon Drummond Island, at the mouth of River St. Mary, territory soon thereafter found to belong to the United States. It was not until thirteen years later (1828) that the English forces were finally and reluctantly withdrawn from Drummond Island,¹ and English agents upon our northern

¹ In his *Drummond Island*, Samuel F. Cook has given the history of the British occupation thereof, with numerous photographs of the ruins and surroundings of the old fort.

14 frontier ceased craftily to stir our uneasy Indian wards to, bickerings and strife.

When the United States resumed possession of Mackinac Island the name of the fort built by the English on the highest ground was changed from Fort George to Fort Holmes, in honor of the victim of the assault of the year before; but later this position was abandoned, and old Fort Mackinac, built by Sinclair and capitulated by Hanks, was rehabilitated, and remains to this day as the military stronghold of the district.

The name of Mackinac will always be intimately associated with the story of the fur trade. We have seen that the first settlement upon the shores of these straits had its inception in the primitive commerce of the woods; and chiefly as a protection to this trade the several forts were maintained under changing flags unto our own day. In 1783 the Northwest Fur Company opened headquarters here; later, the Mackinac Company and the Southwest

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Fur Company were formidable competitors; in 1815, with the reestablishment of the American arms, came the American Fur Company, of which John Jacob Astor was the controlling spirit.

We cannot fully understand the course of history in this region unless we remember that despite the treaty of Ghent (1783), Jay's treaty (1794), Wayne's Indian treaty at Greenville (1795), and the occupation of Fort Mackinac by United States troops between 1796 and 1812, the fur trade upon the upper lakes and beyond was not really under American control until after the war of 1812–15; indeed, the territory itself was not within the sphere of American influence until that time, beyond the visible limits of the armed camps. at Mackinac and Green Bay. After the Jay treaty, British traders, with French and half-breed clerks and *voyageurs*, were still permitted free intercourse with the savages of our Northwest, and held substantial domination over them. The Mackinac, Northwest, and Southwest companies were composed of British subjects—Scotchmen mainly—with headquarters at Montreal, and distributing points at Detroit, 15 Mackinac, Sault Ste. Marie, and Grand Portage. Their clerks and *voyageurs* were wide travellers, and carried the forest trade throughout the far west, from Great Slave Lake on the north to the valleys of the Platte and the Arkansas on the south, and to the parks and basins of the Rocky Mountains. Goods were sent up the lakes from Montreal, either by relays of sailing vessels, with portages of men and merchandise at the Falls of Niagara and the Sault Ste. Marie, or by picturesque fleets of bateaux and canoes up the Ottawa River and down French Creek into Georgian Bay, from there scattering to the companies' various *entrepots* of the south, west, and north.¹

¹ See Turner's "Fur Trade in Wisconsin," *Wis. Hist. Soc. Proc.*, 1889.

The Creole boatmen were a reckless set. They took life easily, but bore ill the mildest restraints of the trading settlements; their home was on the lakes and rivers and in the Indian camps, where they joyously partook of the most humble fare, and on occasion were not averse to suffering extraordinary hardships in the service of their *bourgeois*. Their pay

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was light, but their thoughts were lighter, and the vaulted forest rang with the gay laughter of these heedless adventurers; while the pent-up valleys of our bluff-girted streams echoed the refrains of their rudely melodious boating songs, which served the double purpose of whiling the idle hours away and measuring progress along the glistening waterways.

In Irving's *Astoria* is a charming description of fur-trading life at the Grand Portage of Lake Superior, over which boats and cargoes were carried from the eastward-flowing Pigeon to the tortuous waters which glide through a hundred sylvan lakes and over a hundred dashing rapids into the wide-reaching system of Lake Winnepeg and the Assiniboine.² The book records the heroic trans-continental expedition of Wilson and Hunt, which started from Mackinaw one bright morning in August, 1809, and wended its toilsome way along many a river and through mountain-passes,

² For historical sketch of Grand Portage, see *Wis. Hist. Colls.*, xi, pp. 123–125. See N.Y. *Nation*, Dec. 23, 1897, pp. 499–501, for corrections of *Astoria*.

16 beset by a thousand perils, to plant far-distant Astoria.

With the coming of peace in 1815, English fur-traders were forbidden the country, and American interests, represented by Astor's great company, were at last dominant in this great field of commerce. New and improved methods were introduced, and the American Fur Company soon had a firm hold upon the western country; nevertheless, the great corporation never succeeded in ridding itself of the necessity of employing the Creole and mixed-blood *voyageurs*, *engagés*, and interpreters, and was obliged to shape its policy so as to accommodate this great army of easy-going subordinates.

The fur trade of Mackinac was in its heyday about the year 1820. Gradually, with the inrush of settlement and the consequent cutting of the timber, the commerce of the forest waned, until about 1840 it was practically at an end, and the halcyon days of Mackinac were o'er. For years it was prominent as the site of a Protestant mission to the modernized Indians of Michigan and Wisconsin;¹ finally, even this special interest was removed to new

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seats of influence, nearer the vanishing tribes, and Mackinac became resigned to the humdrum of modern life—a sort of Malta, now but spasmodically garrisoned; a fishing station for the Chicago trade; a port of call for vessels passing her door; a resort for summer tourists; a scene which the historical novelist may dress to his fancy; a shrine at which the historical pilgrim may worship, thankful, indeed, that in what many think the Sahara of American history are left a few romantic oases like unto this.

1 For an account of this experiment, see Williams's *The Old Mission Church of Mackinac Island* (Detroit, 1895).